

Sunday, August 20, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“Is It Fair?”
Genesis 45:1-15 and Matthew 15 (10-20) 21-28

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “Please share an incident where you felt you were not treated fairly.” [Answers could be about workload, driving, taxation, family relationships, and/or kindness/fairness toward oneself.]

Genesis 45:1-15. Context. We last left Joseph sold into slavery in Egypt. In the many years that passed between last week's and this week's reading, Joseph had become Pharaoh's right hand man on account of his ability to interpret dreams, and he was responsible for managing the food supply for all of Egypt, storing the surplus in wet years and distributing the surplus as dry years stretched into drought. The drought even affected the land of Canaan. When Jacob heard that there was still grain in Egypt he sent his ten sons – all but Benjamin who was the apple of Jacob's eye and Joseph's full brother – to get some. When they arrived in Egypt, they did not recognize their brother, who gave them all the grain they wanted but kept Simeon as surety that they should bring Benjamin when they returned. When the grain ran out again in Canaan, only with great coaxing did Jacob agree to send Benjamin. When the brothers arrived back in Egypt Simeon was released, but Joseph tested their love for their father, claiming that he would keep Benjamin as a slave for allegedly stealing from him. Judah stepped forward and begged Joseph to make him his slave in place of his brother Benjamin, out of respect for Jacob. ...

Matthew 15 (10-20) 21-28. Context. This week's reading falls into two parts: the first is Jesus' critique of the religious leadership of his day, and the second is Jesus' (initial) rebuff of the Canaanite (read Gentile) woman's request, followed by her persistent faith and Jesus' granting her prayer. It's as though Jesus paused to reflect on his own critique of the religious leadership as he listened to the woman's plea: "Hmmm.. I'm not becoming one of them, am I?" The passage as a whole almost reads like an allegory of Paul's point about both Jew and Gentile having fallen short of the glory of God, but those believing that Jesus is Lord will receive God's blessings.

Read Genesis 45:1-15 and Matthew 15 (10-20) 21-28

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

Read Genesis 45:1-15 and Matthew 15 (10-20) 21-28 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- After reading Genesis 45:1-15 (or after recalling the life of Joseph), what experiences did Joseph endure that were unfair?
- After reading Matthew 15:21-28, do you think that it is fair for the Canaanite woman to endure Jesus' harsh words to save her daughter? How so?
- In Genesis 45:5, Joseph confesses that "God sent me before you to preserve life" (NRSVUE). Joseph justifies the pain he had to endure because it was part of God's plan. Many Christians use the expression "God's plan" to explain the unexplainable: this or that happened to you because it is God's plan. What are your thoughts about this expression or theological justification? Is it fair? What does it say about God's character? If you dislike this expression, what is your alternative?
- Author, Derek Weber, writes: "Do we acknowledge our privilege over those who have less in terms of access, goods and services, and in terms of treatment by those in authority?" Dr. Weber invites us to reflect on our privileges before we measure the fairness of an incident. Instead of considering privileges as shame (or something to hide/deny), we are encouraged to use privilege as an opportunity to participate in gracious ministries. If you are willing and able, please share your privileges (gender, race, financially well-off, able-bodied, etc.) Then, please share how your privileges could be used as opportunities to share the gospel.
- God's grace is the ultimate manifestation of undeserved fairness. We call this "unconditional love." This is only partially the way Wesleyans understand grace. If we received God's grace based upon our so-called "holiness," would any of us be holy enough to receive God's grace? Please reflect upon how God's grace has been part of your life in ways that are overflowing and unconditional.
- Dr. Weber challenges us: "When we are truly seeking the face of God, we go beyond fair and move into grace manifested in love in all our relationships."

I don't think that Dr. Weber is denying fairness. Rather, our need for fairness must be guided by God's grace; otherwise, we would be swallowed by pettiness and anger. With a partner or two, please share how we could fight for justice and fairness with the intention of seeking the face of God in one another and with all of God's creation.

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

God of justice, we thank you for your unconditional love. We seek fairness and justice in our lives every day. Forgive us when we are not fair or just to others or ourselves. Guide us with your wisdom as we navigate this difficult world. As we who are in positions of power and privilege acknowledge the gifts we have freely received, help us to freely share the gifts we have received. In the name of the Christ who died for us. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.